

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

S/AMTVBASSY PARIS 4821

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 0607

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, ELAB, EGEN, TS

SUBJECT: TUNISIAN PROFESSIONAL CLASS PROTESTS NEW GOT TAX
MEASURES

REF: TUNIS 0097

1. IN RESPONSE TO TAX CONTROL MEASURES PASSED AT CLOSE
OF ANNUAL NATIONAL ASEMBLY BUDGET DEBATES, TUNISIA'S
ASSOCIATIONS OF PHYSICIANS, ATTORNEYS AND DENTISTS
HELD GENERAL MEETINGS TO PROTEST ANNOUNCED PLAN TO
IMPROVE TAX COLLECTION BY REQUIRING BETTER RECORD KEEPING
BY SELF-EMPLOYED. CRITICISM HAS BEEN ON BOTH HIGHER
TAXES AND ON "UNWORKABLE" WAYS THEY ARE TO BE DETERMINED;
I.E., ON BASIS OF NUMBERS OF DRUG PRESCRIPTIONS WRITTEN
AND OF NUMBERS OF COURT APPEARANCES. FOUR HUNDRED
PHYSICIANS MET ON JANUARY 11 AND AFTER STORMY SESSION PASSED
RESOLUTION THAT PROTESTED MANNER IN WHICH GOVERNMENT "CAST
ASPERSIONS ON HONOR AND DIGNITY" OF THEIR PROFESSION, CALLED
GOT PROPOSALS "INAPPLICABLE" BECAUSE THEY VIOLATE MEDICAL
PRINCIPLES, CLAIMED THAT PHYSICIANS ARE WILLING TO PAY THEIR
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TAXES IF EVERYONE ELSE DOES, CALLED FOR A FISCAL REFORM THAT
TAKES INTO ACCOUNT SPECIAL STATUS OF PHYSICIANS, AND DEMANDED
PUBLICATION OF RETURNS OF ALL TUNISIAN TAX PAYERS. THE
300 LAWYERS WHO MET JANUARY 14 (IN WHAT PRESS CALLED
TUMULTUOUS SESSION) PASSED SIMILAR RESOLUTION THAT ALSO
CALLED TAX LAW "UNJUST AND WITHOUT SOCIAL OR ECONOMIC
JUSTIFICATION." ATTORNEYS CALLED FOR ITS REPEAL APD

SAID THEY ARE READY TO RESORT TO THE "FINAL MEANS," INCLUDING STRIKE. FIFTY DENTISTS HELD LESS STORMY MEETINGS BUT THEY CRITICIZED AS WELL THE GOVERNMENT'S TREATMENT OF THE TAX ISSUE.

3. PHYSICIANS' AND ATTORNEYS' MEETINGS WERE CHARACTERIZED BY BITTER RECRIMINATIONS AND OPEN ACCUSATIONS THAT MUCH BIGGER FISH ARE SLIPPING THROUGH GOT TAX NET, INCLUDING SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. PARTICIPANOS INCLUDED SEVERAL NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEPUTIES, INCLUDING PHYSICIAN CHEDLI BEN JAAFAR AND ATTORNEY FETHI ZOUHIR (A VICE PRESIDENT OF ASSEMBLY) WHO WERE QUOTED IN PRESS ACCOUNTS OF MEETINGS AS AGREEING FULLY WITH COLLEAGUES' CONSENSUS.

4. PSD DAILIES L'ACTION AND AL-AMAL HAVE IGNORED MEETINGS BUT SEMI-INDEPENDENT LE TEMPS AND AS-SABAH HAVE PUBLISHED VIVID ACCOUNTS OF ALL THREE. PARTY OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN SENSITIVE ABOUT CRITICISM OF ATTORNEYS AND PHYSICIANS AND UNWILLING TO EXPRESS THEIR OPINIONS ON THIS DEVELOPMENT TO EMBASSY OFFICERS.

5. TUNISIA HAS RARELY WITNESSED SUCH VOCIFEROUS AND OPEN OPPOSITION TO A PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED GOVERNMENT POLICY CONSECRATED IN AN ACT OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. ATTORNEYS' STRIKE THREAT IS PROBABLY AN EMPTY ONE, AND IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT THEY OR PHYSICIANS, WHO HAVE ALSO SPOKEN OF STRIKING, WILL GO TO THE MAT. ALL THREE GROUPS ARE LIKELY, NEVERTHELESS, TO CONTINUE THEIR OPEN CONFIDENTIAL

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OPPOSITION TONEW GOT TAX MEASURES.

6. THESE ANTI-GOVERNMENT STATEMENTS MAY REDOUND TO GOT'S BENEFIT9 TUNISIAN PUBLIC AT LARGE VIEWS BOTH PHYSICIANS AND ATTORNEYS AS VAGUELY PARASITIC, AND COMMONLY HELD OPINION IS THAT THEY AVOID PAYING TAXES AS WELL. THEIR ATTACKS ON THE GOVERNMENT MAY HAVE DRAMATIZED FOR THE PUBLIC AT LARGE, IN A WAY THAT HEDI NOUIRA COULD NOT HAVE DONE HIMSELF, THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S INTENTION TO MAKE THE NONSALARIED AND THE SELF-EMPLOYED PAY TAXES "JUST LIKE EVERYBODY ELSE." MULCAHY

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